

Why Her Cakes Sell Out 18 Months Ahead (It's Not the Decorating)

David Crabill: Welcome to the Forrager Podcast, where I talk with cottage food entrepreneurs about their strategies for running a food business from home. I'm David Crabill, and today I'm talking with Sara Jane Warnow.

But before we begin, I wanted to thank the sponsor of today's episode, Cottage CMS. [Cottage CMS](#) is a website and business platform built specifically for cottage food entrepreneurs.

They now power well over 2,000 food business websites, and for good reason. I've checked it out myself, and it is genuinely impressive. The core idea behind the platform is simple. It helps you look established before you feel established, which is exactly the kind of edge a new cottage food business needs.

I'll talk more about Cottage CMS later in this episode, so stay tuned for that and a special offer for Forrager podcast listeners. All right, so I have Sara on the show today. She lives in Topeka, Kansas, and sells custom cakes with her cottage food business, [Oh My Goodies!](#)

When Sara started her cake business five years ago, she thought it would just be a little side business. But as word of mouth spread, she quickly realized that it was going to be much bigger. The demand for Sara's cakes is simply off the charts. She now has over 18,000 Facebook followers and is already fully booked for all of this year and next year.

And her success isn't limited to just cakes. Every Christmas, she sells 2,000 cinnamon rolls, and this past year, she sold out of them in just four minutes. But although Sara is an incredible cake decorator, the truth is there are many skilled bakers out there that haven't had nearly this level of demand for their products.

So today, I wanted to figure out why Sara's bakery is different, and by the end of this episode, I think you'll clearly see why Sara has been so successful. And with that, let's jump right into this episode

Welcome to the show, Sara. Nice to have you here

[00:02:07] **Sara Warnow:** Hi. Thank you. Thank you for having me

[00:02:09] **David Crabill:** Well, Sara, can you take me back? How did this journey get started for you?

[00:02:14] **Sara Warnow:** So this journey with my home bakery started, gosh, when I was a kid, actually. Uh, it just took me 40 years to turn it into reality. Um, when I was young and growing up, my mom and my grandma both loved to bake and, uh, anywhere from, uh, homemade cinnamon rolls is actually my very first memory of baking with my mom and my grandma.

And they would bray- bake breads and cookies and brownies and desserts and, um, just... I just loved being in the kitchen. It was my absolute favorite place to be because we got to spend time together, and I mean, who doesn't love baked goods and dessert? So it was kind of the best of both worlds. So I, um, went through school, didn't have any formal training with baking.

I just loved to do it. It was just something I, um, would do in my free time. Got married and had four kids of my own, and so that gave me four excuses to make birthday cakes and, and all the desserts for potlucks and fundraisers, and I was PTO president, so I would run bake sales and things like that. But still, it was just a hobby, just something I liked to do, and it made people happy.

And, um, had a career. I've, I worked in law firms, I've been office managers, and I currently actually still work full-time, um, with school administrators in our public education system for the state of Kansas. So love my careers. I've loved being able to be in that professional setting as my kids were growing up, and they all decided to grow up and move out and left me with all this free time.

And I... My husband, um, Kenny, who we've been married for now five years, he works for the railroad, and so he travels a lot. And so when all my kids grew up and got careers of their own and, and started their own families, and Kenny travels for the railroad, I thought, "I have all this free time, and I love to bake."

And I knew I could bake s- things that tasted good because of my upbringing and learning a lot from my family. I, I loved to watch other people decorate cakes, and I was just mesmerized. I'm like, "Oh, it's so beautiful, and it looks so easy," and just the simple act of turning your turntable and smoothing out buttercream, and I thought, "I, I can do that."

If I can make things taste good, I can make things look good too, right?" And so I just started practicing and realized that it's not as easy as the people on TV made it look, but I loved it. I absolutely enjoyed learning new things and different techniques and working

with different mediums. And so I just started practicing and doing all of these fun things and feeding them to my friends, my family, and my coworkers.

And at one point they said, "Sara, if you don't start a business, we're gonna be 500 pounds 'cause you keep feeding us all of these things. Um, but you're really good at it, and I, I feel like Topeka and our community needs somebody that can do kind of the things that you do and are able to do with cake." So five years ago almost, um, in two weeks, my business will celebrate five years in being a business, so

[00:05:07] **David Crabill:** Now, you know, this is something that came when you're an empty nester and you said you've had multiple careers. Has that been something that you've thought about? Has it been like something in the back of your head like, "Oh, maybe I should start a bakery someday"?

[00:05:19] **Sara Warnow:** No, not at all. Really not until I was, um, kind of faced with the extra time, and then it was just turning my hobby into something that I did more frequently. And when I saw the potential of other people needing kind of a service that I was able to provide, then I started thinking, "Okay, this actually could be a legitimate business."

And so then I started really researching the business side of owning a cottage bakery, and it, it really went from not even really a thought to I'm an LLC, and I have a Facebook business page, and I'm taking orders, and I have insurance, and I have, you know, all of these things. Um, within a pretty short period of time.

It took me about six months from the, the day I was like, "Okay, this is a potentially good business" to I'm now up and running and, and taking orders.

[00:06:11] **David Crabill:** So it sounds like you went through all the steps to kind of set it up officially, legit. What were you expecting? If you can go back to that time, like what did you think or hope the business would become?

[00:06:24] **Sara Warnow:** N-Not what it is today at all. I, I thought I would be able to just, um, help with people's special occasions. I never even thought I'd do weddings or anything. That's, that's a big, big, important day in people's lives, and I'm like, I'm not... I'm just a home baker. I'm, I've learned on the internet. I've never had formal training.

I've never... I've, I've taken one, like, fun class, but I've never taken classes. I've never done any of the, uh, typical things you would expect, like, a pastry chef to, to have done. So I thought, you know, if I can make somebody's birthday a little extra special 'cause I can make a cute cake and some cupcakes that tasted good, um, you know, maybe do, you know, three or four orders a week, um, for friends and family and, you know, maybe

some of their friends and family that have kind of had the goods that I've baked for their parties, then, you know, I could grow a little bit.

But, you know, I was expecting just a very small, just kinda side business that I could do with a little bit of free time to, to fill in those gaps that I, I would normally spend watching Netflix or, you know, eating my own cake sitting on the couch. So I may as well, you know, turn it into a business. But yeah, no expectations as far as how big I wanted it to go.

[00:07:39] **David Crabill:** Yeah. And I know how big it's gotten, and it's obviously just blown up in the last few years. So when did you start to realize, "Wow, like this, this is gonna be a lot bigger endeavor than I realized"?

[00:07:53] **Sara Warnow:** I would say probably after the first year, and maybe even like six months in, I kind of felt the need grow and the following grow and the people reaching out for more orders grow. And I didn't really put much thought into the fact that a cake business like this, it really sells itself. I, I don't have to pay for marketing.

I don't have to advertise. I don't have to do all of those things because when I bake for event, all of those people that are attending those, those events that I'm baking for have-- they may have never heard of me, but they go and they try a piece of cake or they try a cupcake and they're like, "Oh, this is really good.

Who made this?" And immediately there's word of mouth, you know? And so the impact of that, and then when I kind of got my first wedding, and then you're feeding 200 people, not just 20 people at a kid's birthday party, um, I didn't really think about how much that that would help my business grow. And also the social media aspect.

I use that a lot for everything. Obviously, everything I do, I share online, and I, I put myself out there, and that has really, really helped me grow because I try to resonate, and I tell stories. You know? This, this cake may just look like, you know, another pink, glittery birthday cake, but there's a story behind that.

There's a reason these people ordered this, and I, I share that, of course, with my followers and my clients' permission. Um, and I share that with my followers. And so then it's not-- they're just not following a cake page. They're following somebody who is very involved in the community, which is another whole aspect of, of what I've kind of turned the business into.

Um, so when I kind of started feeling that and seeing where some of my followers were coming from and some of my orders were coming from, then I kind of realized, um, what direction I kind of wanted the business to go

[00:09:49] **David Crabill:** I definitely want to get into that. I noticed, you know, storytelling's a big thing to you. You know, it's not just a cake for you, right? But, um, I also noticed in, in looking into your background that it's not just a business for you, right? On the flip side, like you have this background where now you're making all these celebration cakes for people, and that's not something that you even got to have when you were growing up.

Can you share a little bit about that background?

[00:10:15] **Sara Warnow:** Yeah. Yeah, that, that is a big part of where my heart and my passion comes from in this business. So growing up, for as long as I can remember, um, my mom was and is a Jehovah's Witness, so we did not celebrate. If anybody, if your followers know anything about the, um,

that

community is no one day is more important or celebrated more than others.

So that being said, we didn't have the traditional, uh... I didn't get to do class parties w- at school. I didn't get to celebrate birthdays. I didn't get to celebrate Christmas or anything at all that one day is more important than another. Um, I didn't even really know what, when my birthday was until, you know, I kinda started school and friends started talking about it.

But we would have, you know, Christmas parties at school or e- everybody... I went to a very small school. I graduated with a class of, I think, 46. So, uh, I was definitely the weird kid that during Christmas parties I had to go sit in the hallway and do homework, or class parties when they were doing Heads Up, Seven Up because it was some- you know, Suzy's birthday, I had to go, you know, sit and, and out in the hallway and not got to participate.

And so, um, yeah, I missed that. You know, it was, uh, they were having fun, and I didn't get to be a part of that. So to make up for that, I always wanted to be kind. I always wanted to be nice. I wanted to be social. I wanted to make up for, okay, well, I can't come to your birthday party, but, you know, I just, I wanted to be the fun person to hang out with because I wanted...

I didn't wanna be that weird kid that kind of had that stigmatism as, you know, being different than everybody else because it stands out a lot when you're the only one in the school. Or my brothers too. But, so, uh, that's kind of where my outgoing personality kind of came and my kindness and community outreach and things like that, that I really

wanted other people to feel included 'cause I, you know, I kind of missed a little bit of that feeling included.

And so when the cake business kind of took off, um, or the ideas in my head, I thought, "I missed out on a lot of celebrations as a kid 'cause I didn't get to do that kind of stuff." I went trick-or-treating one time, and this might be the only time my mom is hearing about this. I'm in middle school. I, I spent the night with a friend's hou- at a friend's house, and we went trick-or-treating, and it was the best night of my life.

Of course, I got all this candy, and I couldn't take it home 'cause I didn't want my mom to know I went trick-or-treating. And so I hu- hid it in my locker in middle school and, and ate on that candy for, like, the whole rest of the year. It was amazing. Uh, but so little things like that that I... Now I love Halloween.

It's, like, one of my favorite holidays. Um, so being able to now take part and be just a little bit, whether I get to attend these parties now as an adult or just get to bake a cake for them, I get to kinda contribute to those celebrations that I never got to have as a kid. So I'm kinda making up for all of those, uh, childhood You know, missteps that I didn't have, so

[00:13:17] **David Crabill:** Yeah, and, and I just wanna add to this because you didn't mention it, but I saw, you know, you have a wonderful relationship with your mom, right? You know,

[00:13:24] **Sara Warnow:** I, I do. Oh my gosh, I absolutely do. She's one of my biggest fans, huge supporter. She, she's great and, and even though we obviously have different views on religion and things, it's never... She is the most kind, most giving person in the world, and I learned a lot of what I do as far as giving back and being kind and, uh, everything that I kinda give back, I learned a lot from her.

And she, she would give you the shirt off her back. She is, she's amazing, and she actually gets to be my date on a lot of things that I go and do for the business. I'm like, "Hey Mom, come, come along." So she really is the one that instilled my love of baking too. Uh, like I started with, with her and my grandma.

So, so yes, that's why I don't look back negatively on my childhood. It's just different. It's just something that actually helped shape me to who I am today

[00:14:13] **David Crabill:** Now, uh, when you started the business, you said that you baked for your kids' birthdays and everything, but the cakes weren't anything particularly special. But when you started the business, you said you had been watching a lot of decorating shows, tried your hand at it. How do you feel like... I, I know, like now you're

this amazing decorator, and I know I'm sure it doesn't compare to what you were five years ago.

But I mean, how would you evaluate yourself kind of from a, a third-person viewpoint? Like, how were your decorating skills when you started the business?

[00:14:45] **Sara Warnow:** I thought they were great.

[00:14:47] **David Crabill:** Yeah

[00:14:48] **Sara Warnow:** I, I mean, I knew I had a lot to learn, don't get me wrong. But, uh, and I also didn't start with like super detailed complicated cakes, you know? I, I-- my... The very first cake I sold to somebody who wasn't a family or friend, um, was like an Oreo cookies and cream cake that had, you know, chocolate drizzle and little swirls of frosting on the top.

Like it looked, it looked great. It just was not what I do today. Um, but I had a lot of encouragement, and I only did and sold what I felt confident was good. So there were lots of times where I would do cakes, you know, two or three different times to... They-- it tasted fine. I didn't have to like re-bake a cake or anything.

But when it came to the decorating, I, "Oh, I'm not really happy with that. I think I could do better." So I would do, do better. And my husband, Kenny, is great at keeping me honest, and he is, uh, one of those brutally honest people, positively. He's never negative, but he would say, "Oh, you know, I think you missed a spot on the back."

Or he would never say, "Oh, honey, that looks great," when it didn't. And so I was always like, "Okay, I gotta make this look good enough to pass the Kenny test." And if, uh, if I knew that it looked good enough for him, then I knew that it was, uh, good enough to I could sell it and, and feel confident that I was doing the best job I could.

But there were times that people would ask me for certain cakes or send me pictures of inspiration and, and I, I knew that I could not fulfill that or I could not do quite what they were asking for because I didn't have the skill set yet. And so we would either go in a different direction or I would turn down the order.

And, and so but if I turned down the order, I learned how to do what they were asking or I would practice until I felt confident enough that, hey, next time somebody asks me to do that, I'm gonna be able to say yes.

[00:16:36] **David Crabill:** One thing that stands out to me looking at your cakes and also dating back is that, you know, you j- seem to have, like, this knack for creativity, and you d- so it seems like something that's almost inborn. Maybe it's something that

you learned, but also what's interesting is I couldn't really find in my research, you know, you using that skill in your past careers or anything.

And so I was wondering, like, do you feel like this, you know, create, you know, creativity skill that you have, do you feel like that was something that you actually tapped into before this business?

[00:17:11] **Sara Warnow:** Uh, yeah, I feel like I've always been somewhat creative, just not in the cake baking business, of course. I just-- I mean, having four kids, you know, they always had the coolest Halloween costumes, and I was always, you know, their classroom, the head mom or, you know, the, the... I was president of the PTO, and so I would love to come up with ideas for, like, school fundraisers.

And I, I tried my hand at all kinds of... Refinished some furniture for a little while, and that was fun. And, but I was never really, like, artsy. I, you know, I'm not a painter. I can't draw to save my life. And I, I, I never really had a specific outlet for being creative, but I could come up with ideas. So, uh, you know, a friend of mine has been recently diagnosed with cancer.

Their family is struggling. What can I come up with, something new that I can do to help raise some money? And so I did, like, um, Instant Pot recipe night at Sara's house, where I had all my girlfriends come over, and we, we-- I came up with recipes, and everybody had their own little to-go containers. And, and so it wasn't always in cakes.

In fact, it wasn't at all really in cakes until I started the business. But there was always this drive for coming up with new and unique things to try to-- whatever my goal was that I could try to achieve, and doing something different that you couldn't find anywhere else, 'cause that's what people are looking for.

You don't want to do the same thing that everybody else in your business or in your community does. Yeah.

[00:18:45] **David Crabill:** you feel like your community just doesn't have... Because your, your growth, you know, we haven't really gotten into it, but, you know, it's just, it's gone crazy, and, like, it seems like there's this, like, lack of supply for these types of cakes. Do you feel like there just isn't, um, enough bakers in your area doing cakes like this?

[00:19:05] **Sara Warnow:** I, I, you know, I wouldn't say that 'cause there's a lot of us here. I mean, Topeka's not a huge town, um, but we're big. You know, we're the capital of the state. And I, since starting the business, have become really, really good friends with a lot of other local bakers that do the exact same thing I do actually.

Um, we all make fancy cakes and cupcakes, and a lot of them also do, like, cookies and brownies, and I, I don't get into that market 'cause I, I know my limits, and I know what I'm good at, and I stick with that. Um, but I feel like for the, um, creativity and for the uniqueness and kinda over-the-top designs, um, there are not quite as many.

There's a lot of people that make some really, really good-tasting desserts and baked goods here. Um, but the pool goes a little bit smaller when you start looking at, "I want a cake that looks like a Nike Air Force One." You know? Or, uh, make a cake that looks like the building on our campus downtown. You know, that is a little bit different skill set, and so, um, there's not as many.

And so that's a little bit where I can kinda come in and be like, "Yeah, I, I can do that." I've, I've kinda taught myself the skills that I know how to make a shingled roof that, you know, you can eat, and shoelaces that, you know, are edible. So it's, it's that, the techniques and things that I've been able to learn, but also, um, the creativity.

You know, or a lot of people are s- "I don't know what I want. I just want a cake for my mom who's turning 80, but here's, like, a whole long list of all her favorite things." You know, not a lot of bakers will be like, "All right, I got it. I'll come up with something perfect for you." They want, like, "Send me a picture.

Like, send me an inspiration picture, and I can do that." And there's a lot of people here that can do that, and they'll do a great job. Um, but having the creativity to kinda come up with a cake that tells your story, that's, that's a little bit more difficult to, to find somebody. And all of my clients too, uh, not all, most of my clients come back to me year after year after year.

And so I don't just go off of what they tell me they want. I go off of who they are as a person 'cause we've gotten to know each other throughout our relationship with the cakes

[00:21:19] **David Crabill:** Yeah, in looking at your business, it looked to me like that's what you prefer. Like, you actually prefer to ha- like, understand the client's story and then have your own creative freedom. Is that correct?

[00:21:33] **Sara Warnow:** Yeah. Actually, I'd say 95% of my, um, cakes are all just here's the theme, here's a general direction, do whatever you want. Um, the only times I really am sent inspiration pictures are sometimes brides. They're a little bit more specific, as they should be. It's their wedding day. You want what you want.

Um, but even I've noticed lately the trends even with weddings are, "Here's kind of our Pinterest board," or, "Here's, you know, what our table setting's gonna be. Come up with

a cake that you think will match." 'Cause they know that I know what I'm capable of. They know what tools I have. They know what skill set I have.

They know what materials I'm comfortable working with. And they don't necessarily know all of those things. So the vision that they may have, but what I know I'm capable of are two different things. And so they know that they can just trust me to, to come up with something that is truly unique and also better than they maybe even could find on Google or Instagram

[00:22:38] **David Crabill:** Well, you know, whatever it may be, your skillset and, you know, understanding client stories, your growth has been phenomenal. Can you just kind of walk us through what the last five years have looked like?

[00:22:52] **Sara Warnow:** Yeah. It, it

it really was insane. I, I did not think about growth and followers and content creation and influencers. I didn't think about any of that when I started the business. I just wanted to bake cakes and wanted them to taste good and wanted people to be happy when they, when they picked them up and when they ate them also.

And, uh, the more I did and the more I shared and the more I kind of... You know, you tell your story with pictures and then also with the words that you share. Um, and then people would share that, and then their friends would see that, and then they would share that. And it just kind of multiplied way, way faster.

And obviously, the bigger you get, the faster it's gonna multiply because you have more people that are seeing your stuff. And, um, I belong to a lot of, like, cottage bakery Facebook pages, and Facebook is definitely my main social media source. I have an Instagram. I have a TikTok. Um, I don't really use those platforms because they're not as, um, easy to work with when it comes to, like, having people place orders with me and things like that.

So I just-- I like the format of Facebook better, and so that's where I post the majority of my content

But

also, it also makes it easier for people to share that content. And so you start to get a lot of new followers that way. Um, also posting in those other groups, you know, cottage bakery groups and home bakers or cakes for beginners and things like that.

You learn so much just from seeing other people's stories and posts as well, and they're like, "Oh, look at this cake." You know, you gotta brag on yourself a little bit. If you're

proud of your work, like, you wanna share it. Yes, you can share it on your page, but you share it with other people who do the same thing you do, and they compliment you, and they're like, "Oh, that's really good."

It, it hits different 'cause then you're like, "Oh, she knows what's a good cake," you know? There's one lady I follow, and she's amazing. She makes these amazing cakes, and sh- whenever she comments on my stuff, I'm like, "Oh, she sees me," you know. So it's, it's a whole community out there. Um, I went to a cake show in Miami, Florida, with my husband a few years ago and got to meet a lot of, um, I...

reality TV stars that have been on f- like, cake competition shows before, and ended up, of course, following all of them, and then they would follow me back. And I, again, it's that whole like, "Oh, wow," you know. It's pretty cool to know that, that these big people who have done some really big things, um, see my work and, and will comment and stuff.

So the following that you get from that, uh, posting on those pages. Also, I will, I will tag other businesses. I am all about supporting... And, and not just other local small businesses. That's my absolute favorite thing to do. Um, I'll try cakes and cookies and brownies from other home bakers, and I'll share their pages on my page and say, "Oh my gosh, if you guys need a good sugar cookie, this lady's doing an ama- amazing job.

You should check her out." Um, but also big companies. One of my, one of my vices is, uh, Alani's. I love the energy drink Alani's. It's my favorite. And you can ask any of my followers, they know what my favorite flavor is 'cause I share it. And, uh, and I'll tag 'em. I... And they've actually shared one of my posts on their Instagram page.

So, uh, I get all my butter from Sam's Club here. I tag Sam's Club in some of my posts. And so it just helps with your reach. Um, they're not gonna endorse me. I mean, maybe one day. I don't expect that. But it's not monetarily, you know, that you get from that. You... I shop at Aldi's. I love Aldi's. I do a annual cinnamon roll fundraiser, which we make it to that too.

But I put mini marshmallows in my cinnamon rolls. It's my mom and my grandma's recipe, and Aldi's has the best mini marshmallows. And so every Christmas when I get ready for my cinnamon rolls, I make like 2,000 of them. I shop at Aldi's and I buy, buy them out of their mini marshmallows. And I made a post one year of my, you know, my table that had all my supplies the night before I got ready to make my cinnamon rolls, and it blew-- I put it in the Aldi's...

There's like an Aldi's Facebook group. I put it in the group. It blew up. I think I gained like 5,000 followers overnight because people are like, "What are you doing with

marshmallows in cinnamon rolls?" You know, it was this whole, you know. So just things like that that you don't realize the reach that you can get.

So now these people started following me because I put marshmallows in my cinnamon rolls from Aldi's, and now they still follow me because they love to look at my cakes. So I mean, I have a lady from Australia that comments all the time, and she's like, "I just love your stories and I love following along and everything that you've been able to do and accomplish," and I-- She, you know, she's, "I'm never gonna order a cake from you.

I live clear across the world." But having her as a follower helps my business even though she's never gonna order from me. So her along with the other 18,000 of them I have, so

[00:27:46] **David Crabill:** I mean, I, we're kind of circling around this, um, question that I have, but, you know, I just kind of want to clarify because you do make amazing cakes. I mean, your, your cakes look fa- fantastic. Although in my world, you know, I've had a lot of podcast guests that they make a lot of amazing cakes too. I mean, there's a lot of people out there that have incredible skill, but honestly, like, not, um, not everyone has the same kind of success that you have had.

You know, even people that have the same skill set that you have. Um, you know, you're currently, like, booked out through next year, you know, through 2027. Um, this is like, this is not normal, um, for a cottage baker to have this kind of growth success. So what do you feel like it is about you in particular, aside from your skill set?

Obviously that has to be good, but what do you think you've done that has kind of catapulted you to this, like, incredible amount of success and being fully booked, you know, like halfway through the year?

[00:28:54] **Sara Warnow:** So I credit a lot of it... Uh, you're right. Like, obviously my cakes have to taste good. They have to look good. You're not gonna pay top dollar for something that you could get at Walmart down the street, you know? Um, but it's the connections. Uh, I I still work full-time at my job with school administrators.

I love my day job. It's great. I absolutely love my coworkers. I feel like I'm making a difference working with public education. Um, could I quit? Yeah, and devote twice as much time to my bus- my bakery business, 'cause it's also a full-time job now. Um, I could, but I'm not going to. And the reason why, and I think another reason why people come to me is because making cakes is not a job to me.

It's not. It's, it doesn't pay my bills. It's not something I have to do. It's not something I dread to do. It's not something that I'm like, "Ugh, I have 15 orders this week that I have

to get done, and if I don't, I may be short on money." It's, I do it because I really, really have a passion for it, and that allows me to involve the community as much as I do.

I, I give back every chance I get. Um, every time somebody has a fundraiser or a gala or, "Hey, our organization, you know, is honoring the women in, you know, that are making a big impact in our community, um, could you, you know, donate desserts to our, our evening event because we wanna spoil them?" Like, absolutely, 100%, I will always say yes.

And I, and it's because I can donate that because I don't do it as a job. I don't do it for the income. Yes, I charge for my cakes. Don't get me wrong. I'm not giving away everything for free. Um, it is a business, but I am able to show that when you come to my business and you do purchase one of my cakes and you do pay me for that, I'm gonna turn around and I'm going to donate a free cake to the Helping Hands Humane Society because they're doing a fundraiser to try to raise money for pet vaccinations.

Or I'm going to, uh, donate my time and go speak to kids that, you know, at the local community center that are low income and they just wanna have a fun activity, so we're gonna go decorate cupcakes together. You know, it's things like that that I'm able to give back to the community because what my business stands for is not about being the biggest, the best, the most expensive cakes and making the most money.

It's about taking that money and taking a skill that I've taught myself and giving it back and sharing it with others. So when people think of, "Okay, well, who should I go to to order a cake?" Well, the, all these people are great, but I know if I spend my money with Sara at Oh My Goodies, she's probably gonna turn around and give to my kids' school fundraiser next week, you know, because that's just what I do.

And so being able to feel like You spending your money at my business is not just because you're gonna get a good cake. It's g- I'm gonna turn around and I'm gonna give it back somehow, some shape, some form. Um, and I th- I feel like we all need that in our life. We all need to know that our money is not just going to these big CEOs that are just gonna go buy a yacht and go on these fancy vacations.

Now, don't get me wrong, I do go on nice vacations. Um, I do work hard. I, I do, um, work hard, play hard, you know. But I, I'm gonna give back to the community before I'm gonna do anything. So I feel like that's one reason why people come to me. And also it's a demand, a supply and de- And people know it's hard to get on my calendar.

So when I say every April when I open up my calendar, okay, '20-- this, this last year, April of '26, I said, "Okay, I'm opening up 2027. I can only take about 15 orders a week 'cause I, I have to sleep at some point." People know that my calendar gets full fast.

Within two weeks it was completely booked out because they know that it's hard to get on, and so people are like, "I'm not waiting because I know that it's gonna fill up."

So I don't know what I want for Johnny's birthday next year, but I know I want Sara's cake, and so I'm gonna get on her calendar, and then we'll figure out the details later." So I try to make it easy for people, too. I don't need to know what theme he's gonna want and what flavor and what size. Like, we'll figure all of that out as it gets closer.

But you just get a spot and you-- when you're hard to get, people know that they have to plan really early in advance, which is also bittersweet. But yeah, it's good for business

[00:33:41] **David Crabill:** Yeah. We're talking about the concept of scarcity here, and I did want to really ask you about that because I, I don't think it's actually intentional. Like, I think you're just trying to manage your limited time. But I mean, what you're essentially creating is this, like, time window where people have to get it now, and then it creates a buzz.

Um, is there any intentionality or business strategy behind that?

[00:34:07] **Sara Warnow:** Absolutely zero. Like completely zero intentionality. And I do see it now, and I do understand how it works, but at the time it re-it really stemmed from, uh, my cinnamon roll fundraiser. I've been actually doing cinnamon rolls for Christmas for twenty years. Um, when my kids were little, my daughter played competitive softball, and so we would do, do it as like a fundraiser to help pay for her team dues and traveling and things.

And, um, I always had a reason. Like, "Hey, let's raise money for, you know, the Joneses down the street who are struggling with a house fire," or, you know, different things like that. And so my cinnamon rolls are very, um, as I touched on earlier, they're unique, and they're hard to get 'cause not-- my mom and I are the only ones that make them, and my mom's are better than mine.

Um, but I've made about a million of them by now, and so mine are pretty good. Um, but I only do them at Christmas time because my cake business and obviously my full-time job and everything. And cinnamon rolls from scratch, for all of you followers out there who are listening, they are not easy, and you know how much work is involved and how much time and how your humidity has to be good and your temperature has to be good.

There's so many factors. Um, it is not something I want to do every day of my life or every week or every month even. It is a once a year, okay, Christmas time, we're doing this. I can, I can pump myself up for it and, and barrel down and, and make two thousand cinnamon rolls in thirty-one hours, and that's what I do.

Um, but that's where kind of the scarcity started. Uh, the cinnamon rolls, as my business grew and I got more followers, more people learned about my cinnamon rolls. And so to make them go smooth, I do pre-orders only, and I don't want just a ton of people coming to pick them up and then I run out and then I have a bunch of disappointed people.

So I would do pre-orders only and, um, sell them on Black Friday or, uh, Small Business Saturday right after Thanksgiving, and then you pick them up on Christmas Eve. That way you have nice, fresh, hot cinnamon rolls Christmas Eve morning. And the first year I did it after I started my business, I think they sold out in about four hours, and I did about a hundred and sixty-five dozen, um, nine by thirteen pans.

And each year since then, as word spreads and people realize that they're good and, and also I donate all the money to different organizations, which is another little fun aspect of, of how I involve my followers and kind of build, uh, anticipation. Um, this last year, coming up on a year or so in twenty twenty-five when I sold them, they sold out in four minutes.

So

[00:36:44] **David Crabill:** just to clarify, it's 2,000 cinnamon

[00:36:47] **Sara Warnow:** Yep, 2,000, ab- around. I didn't count. I just estimated, uh, about how many I can fit per pan, and I, I can't go bigger. I mean, it, it's just me. My mom has come over and helped me a little, my daughter, my son. They come over and, like, do dishes and, you know, but I do it all by hand. Hand roll, h- everything's, um, from scratch obviously, and I can only do so much.

And I've had lots of people, "Well, they're so successful. Why don't you do them again, you know, two weeks later or two weeks before? Do two orders in December." And again, those are the people that have never made homemade cinnamon rolls to realize how much work they are. And, uh, I'm like, "No, I, I just can't." I...

Yes, I could do twice as many, but again, I have a job, and I have a business that I'm running, and four kids and a grandbaby, and, uh, my husband's got two kids, and we've got three grandbabies on that side. So, you know, we've got lots of things going on in our life that I, I know where my limits are, and I stay within those, so

[00:37:46] **David Crabill:** Hey, real quick. Earlier I mentioned our sponsor, Cottage CMS, and I'll be honest with you, when I first came across this platform, I was pretty skeptical. I have seen plenty of software platforms built for cottage food entrepreneurs, but this one feels different. For one, Drew and his wife Kathleen are actually successful cottage food business owners.

I featured their story on episode 165. They built Cottage CMS out of their own bakery, solving the problems they were facing while running their business. Drew also has decades of experience building software tools, so this isn't a side project. This is what he does. As I said in the beginning, Cottage CMS helps cottage food entrepreneurs look established before they feel established.

Because here's the truth, when a potential customer lands on your website, they don't really care how long you've been in business. What they wanna know is whether they can trust you and your products. That's what Cottage CMS does. It gives you the professional presentation your product already deserves, whether you're on day one or year five.

I personally set up a site on Cottage CMS for my fudge business in under an hour, and I was impressed. And clearly I'm not the only one. Cottage CMS now powers well over 2,000 food business websites. So I really encourage you to check them out. Now, as I mentioned at the beginning, we do have a special offer for listeners. You can claim it at cottagecms.com/forrager. Again, that's cottagecms.com/F-O-R-R-A-G-E-R

When you go to sign up, you can set up a totally free website that is free forever. And if you want to try the premium features, you can do that completely risk-free. Drew offers a 30-day money back guarantee, and his support is incredible.

Anyone who uses Cottage CMS will tell you that. So again, check them out at cottagecms.com/forrager. Now back to the show

[00:39:53] **David Crabill:** It is so funny you're talking about limits because, you know, you do take like 10 to 15 cake orders, custom cake orders per week, and I know a lot of cottage food businesses that they do 10 to 15 cake orders as a full-time business. Um, and I know you consider it to be a full-time job, but like you have a full-time job, so talk to me about this because, you know, something's gotta give

[00:40:19] **Sara Warnow:** Yeah. I, I, I say this all the time because people, when they come to pick up cakes, if my husband's home, because Saturdays are sometimes the days where he is home. They say, "I just-- I-- how do you do it? How-- I don't know how you get all this work done." And every time he's like, "Oh gosh, here it is again." 'Cause it, people say it to me so much.

Um, and I say, "I have a lot of energy." I am a very high, high energy, go, go, go all the time. I'm a very early morning person. Um, and I have that right now. One day it will catch up with me. I'm only 48. One day. Today is not that day. So while I have it and while I can do it, I'm gonna do it because why not? I, I love to go all the time.

Um, I get up at 4:20 every morning. Uh, three days a week I go to the gym because I eat a lot of cake. I have to. I have to like cake, right? That's what I do. I have to make sure it tastes good. Um, and it just makes me feel good and some of my best girlfriends are at the gym and we just have a great time. So I get up and I work out.

On the days I don't go to the gym, I get up and I work before I come to work. And then, um, I come to my day job and then as soon as I get home at four o'clock every afternoon, I go straight back to work and I usually work till about 10:00 PM. That's usually kind of my cutoff. I need five hours of sleep a night.

So if I get five hours, I'm good. I'll, I'll be fine the next day. Sometimes I get three, sometimes I get six. But, um, that's where the Alani comes in sometimes when I've had a really late night. Um But again, it's just I'm just really high energy. And so I don't feel like I work all the time. I know I work all the time.

I work... I've, I've kinda done the math. I work between 90, 80 to 100 hours a week. It just depends on, um, how many, how difficult my orders are that week. But I always make time to do other things, you know. I go have dinner at my mom's house, and I go to the new restaurant opening down the street because I wanna support them.

I, you know, I have a gala or whatever. Um, those things are important to me, and I don't ever want to look at my business and regret that I've given up so much of myself to run it. And so I balance that by still making sure I have the time to do those fun things. You know? I try not to work on Saturdays. I have all my cake pickups in the morning.

If I have a wedding, then I'll deliver that. But I try not to bake, I try not to answer emails, I try not to decorate on Saturdays. Those are kind of my days, um, like I said, that's usually the day that my husband's home, and so we can spend some time together, um, outside of the house, outside of the kitchen.

And so it's really all about balance and being super organized. I, I am very, very organized. I have all of my online calendars with all of my orders and all my information. I still handwrite a list every week, every Saturday. Well, uh, that goes back on my not working on Saturdays. Sometimes I work on Saturdays on my next week's orders.

Just, just to write it down so I can physically see what I have for that next week, what day this is getting picked up, what, you know, what their total cost to do is, um, you know, what flavors, what size, all of that. So then I, I order all my groceries online and have them delivered 'cause I do not have time to go to the grocery store, nor do I want to.

Because also me going to the grocery store involves me running into 20 people who I know , and so it's never a quick trip. So I have things, I take convenience where I can to save that time that I can spend doing more important things, whether it's with my family and friends or with my business. So the organization is a big thing for me.

And I just know that, okay, Tuesday night I'm going to mom's for dinner, so I'm gonna probably have to work later Tuesday night to try to make up for that time that I'm missing. So it's, it's all about balance and being your m- the owner of my business, I can work when I want. I can work at three o'clock in the morning if I really want to.

I don't ever want to. I should say if I need to. Um, but I'm gonna do that because if that means I got to spend more time with my parents, then I'm gonna do that

[00:44:30] **David Crabill:** Uh, it's so funny you're talking about balance because, you know, from my notes here, I see that you've done five wedding cake deliveries in a single day.

Um, that was probably on a Saturday, I would imagine. And maybe you don't do that anymore. I mean, it, it, like, it seems like you are just doing absolutely as much as you possibly can do.

Do you feel like you got to a point at some point where you didn't have balance and you've adjusted?

[00:44:59] **Sara Warnow:** Yeah, I definitely kind of hit that a- about a year and a half ago, um, before I opened up my calendar in April the year prior. Um, my husband kinda came to me and said, "You really are not leaving yourself any free time to do..." And he saw me. He's, he knew that I would still make it happen, but I was losing more sleep than I probably should have.

Um, we had a new grandbaby on the way. His, um, his oldest daughter, they were getting ready to move out of state, and little things that we, um, I wanted to be able to do, and like he tr- like I said, he travels for the railroad. I used to be able to go and visit him, you know, wherever he was stationed or whatever, and I was not able to do that because I was doing so much on the weekends with weddings and just during the week with orders.

And I was doing about 15 to 18 orders a week at that point, and he said, "Maybe we should... Maybe you should look at, like, backing off just a little bit." And so we kind of compromised. Well, what about 10? I'll do 10. That's way less. You know, that five to eight orders less every week, and maybe not five weddings in one weekend.

That was, that was a lot. Um, but I also have a huge heart, and when somebody says, you know, "Oh, I-" Y- uh, you can't plan a lot of celebrations a year and a half in advance. You just can't. You d- you don't even know you're pregnant, you know, when you're gonna have a baby shower and, or celebrations of life. You know, horrible things that happen in people's lives, you, you don't plan for.

And so I agreed to do 10 and kind of back off a little bit so I wasn't... I, uh, I wasn't burnt out, but I could see where that's where it could have been headed if I continued to work as much as I was. So I backed off a little bit. I backed down to 10, um, leaving myself a little buffer for those orders that maybe you can't plan ahead of time.

Or, um, I, I actually had four just this last weekend that I took on that were not on my calendar. Um, one was a celebration of life. Um, one was, uh, desserts that I donated to a local children's, um, the Discovery Center for their gala because one of the other bakers who was going to donate, her daughter ended up in the hospital, and she couldn't donate.

And so I said, "I'll make two desserts." Like, um, my granddaughter, Jovi, had her baptism. Uh, of course, I had to do cupcakes for that. You know? So little things like that that I want to be able to fit in that I couldn't have before because there was just no way. I was not going to disappoint the people that were already on my calendar.

So now leaving it at 10 and still doing 15 most of the time, um, I don't know that that's so much of a compromise, but I feel like it is 'cause I don't have to say yes to, you know, a lot of those things. But if I can and I don't have anything else going on, um, then I will because I, I'm a people pleaser, pathological.

[00:48:00] **David Crabill:** Yeah, definitely can tell you're a people pleaser and love to support others. And it seems like, you know, it seems like everything you're doing is supporting others. Do you have any time where you just do something for yourself?

[00:48:13] **Sara Warnow:** Uh, yeah, so I mentioned vacations. I love to travel. My husband and I both love to travel, um, all over the world. Like we-- So for our anniversary, we got married on April Fool's Day, um, twenty twenty-two, and so, uh, we committed at that time every year for anniversary we're gonna go on a big trip, like somewhere.

It didn't matter where, just somewhere new that we had never been to before. So that's one of those things that like if I have it on the calendar, I have that to look forward to, um, and it's, it's s- definitely keeps you going. And so we've done Costa Rica, we've done, um, the year after-- then we went to Fiji, we've done Singapore, we've done Hawaii.

So like big fun trips that not... Well, I know not everybody gets the opportunity to do stuff like that. And so, but it's important to me, and it's important to him, and that we get to have that time together completely uninterrupted. You know, I, I tell all my followers, "All right, I'm, I'm out. I'm gonna be in a different time zone, a different continent."

You know, uh, and I'll still make posts while I'm there just to keep them engaged in the algorithm, you know how social media is. Um, but I'm not answering messages, I'm not taking new orders, I'm not, I'm not ordering groceries, I'm not doing any of that. I'm just completely stepping away. Um, so that is really, really important.

And then also my girlfriends from high school, we're forty-eight, there's six of us, and we still talk all the time, and we've committed to every summer we're gonna do a girls trip. Whether it's Kansas City, which is an hour away, or Nashville is kind of what was on our radar for next year. So that's one thing that, that we've, we committed to and something I definitely do for myself, that I make sure I have time to, to fit in with my busy schedule, no matter how busy it gets.

But they know me, and they know we have to plan these trips like a year and a half in advance. Um, but they're amazing and, and they understand, and we all work together to, to find time for, for us to have those connections

[00:50:13] **David Crabill:** Well, like 10 to 15 cakes per week, I mean, that's, that is a lot of work for custom cake work, and, um, you could even be doing more than that. The demand is there. Um, a lot of people in that situation would, you know, if they didn't wanna get rid of their full-time job like you don't, would hire help, bring on help, you know, have an employee or something.

I know you've chosen not to do that. Um, talk, talk about that

[00:50:42] **Sara Warnow:** I know. Well, does my husband doing my dishes count? He, I,

he's not really a paid employee, so, uh, on Saturdays, which I'm not supposed to really be working on Saturdays, but sometimes on Sundays if he, if he's working close to home, he'll be home and, and he washes all my cake pans for me, which is amazing 'cause there's so many dishes to do.

Um, but no, and yes, I could hire help. Um, the reason I don't, and there's lots of reasons, but the main reason is when people hire me to make their cake, they hire me. They, they're hiring my knowledge, my skills, my heart, my-- Everything that I do, they know that when they're ordering it from me, that I'm the one that's gonna do it.

I'm the one who's messaging them. I'm the one who's posting the content on my social media. I'm the one who is making the buttercream and mixing the cake by hand and, and I know that they would still support me even if I hired someone. In fact, they probably would volunteer to be hired. Like, "Here, let me come work with you," 'cause it would be really fun.

Um, but it's, it's just knowing that, um, the consistency of the products I put out because it's me. I-i... You don't have that consistency if you have employees that are kinda in and out and, and coming and going. Um, and that's really important to me. I know when I go to one of my favorite restaurants, if I order the same thing I always order and it tastes different, I'm gonna notice.

Um, I'm ordering it because I love it. And so when people order cakes from me, they order them because they know they're good and they know what kind of quality they've had in the past. And I want to ensure that I can make sure that that's what they're gonna get every single time. So eventually, um, I'm sure I will get to the point where maybe I do retire from my day job and I do more cakes and maybe even have a shop in my backyard.

You know, there's so many possibilities. Um, in which case, between my husband and I, we've got six kids. I got enough kids I can just hire or grandbabies at that point that they can come work for me. So, uh, I, you know, I don't wanna give away all the family secrets, so keep it in the family. But I don't know.

I, I don't ever wanna get so big that I lose who I am and my hand in every part of the business. Um, AI is, is huge right now. I see a lot of bakers, um, that use that. And by all means, whatever works best for your business. Um, I won't ever use AI to write a post or, or edit my photos or make a flyer. That's just...

It's not genuine. It's not who I am. Um, again, no judgment for people who are, but when you read my stories, you know that those words came from my fingertips and my mouth, not, you know, plugging in this information into a computer and it generates this. And, and I think that that's what has led to a lot of my success too

[00:53:37] **David Crabill:** Yeah, definitely noticing like you just, you need to have that control over every aspect of your business, is which is what normally leads to burnout for a lot of people. But in your case, you know, you're just kind of pulling back on orders to some degree to kind of compensate for that. But, um, do you feel like, you know, sort of having to take ownership?

I mean, it sounds like what you're saying is that the ownership that you feel and the responsibility you feel is part of what has driven the success of your business

[00:54:09] **Sara Warnow:** Yeah. Yeah, I do. I feel like just knowing that I can control, and not in a bad way. I mean, there's definitely a lot to be said about saying, "Hey, I need help." Um, and I, I see that, and I'm sure one day I will definitely be there. Um, but knowing that I am able to kind of dictate how the business goes. So when I open up my calendar next year, say, I only wanna do eight orders, you know, I, I have that option to kind of steer it in the direction I want to go.

I, I have some ideas that I'd like to do to open up the availability for people to have my baked goods that aren't planners a year and a half in advance. I get that. I was never that mom. I would have never been able to order for myself as a young mom growing up and raising kids, ever. A, I couldn't afford a big fancy cake, and B, I just...

I was, I was just trying to survive and get through next week, not a year and a half away. I mean, I had four kids under the age of five, so I was really, really busy. Um, and so I feel like I, I do kind of shut myself off from a lot of those types of clients that that's who I was, and I want to be able to do something for them as well.

And so kind of looking in the future, I wanna be able to do whether it's, you know, pop-ups, "Hey, we're gonna do a special on cupcakes this week," and first come, first serve, or, you know... And I've, I've done those before, where I just do pre-orders, and if you're not on your computer with an alarm set, you miss them.

I mean, they just go so fast. So maybe it's something like I don't do markets, um, but if I can do, "Hey, I'm gonna open up at s- you know, Saturday morning at eight AM, I'm gonna have these cupcakes available, you know, just come," and they're gonna be very reasonably priced. Anybody can afford them. Um, but that lets...

A lot of people haven't even been able to have my cake because it is hard to get on the calendar, and I don't like that. I want to be available to more people. So part of my brain, what keeps me up at night or dreams I have are about how I can kind of mold the business to, to be able to do more, uh, for more people.

So I haven't quite figured it out, but it's, it's on my brain for sure.

[00:56:29] **David Crabill:** Yeah, Yeah, 'cause you, you know, you have obviously all these orders, like over 500 custom cake orders a year, you know, dozens of weddings, and then, you know, you're, um, um, grandma, mom, you know, you're, you're a wife, you've got all these different things going on, and then you ha- this whole other side of the business, which is different projects you do.

Like you're referring to cupcakes, right? You did this like cupcake pop-up in March this pa- this year, right? So what, like what was that like?

[00:56:58] **Sara Warnow:** Oh yeah, the, the Girl Scout cookie cupcakes. That was so much fun. And really that idea came from kind of where I was talking about earlier, just being able to be available to more people who maybe are on a little bit more of a limited budget or again, don't have ti-- can't plan that far in advance for a fancy cake.

Um, or they have six kids and they're not getting all six kids a big fancy cake, but hey, we can get cupcakes and, and, uh, so I thought, you know, well, let's do something fun and I could try some new flavors, um, because I have a menu. I have a website where I have my flavors posted, but I love to try new things and different combinations and, and so I, I love Girl Scout cookies too.

I have a huge sweet tooth, obviously. And so I thought, well, what if I took my love of the cookies, which I don't make cookies, but turn them into cupcake flavors. And so I did six different flavors, you know, a thin mint one, a caramel delight one, you know, peanut butter patty, all of those. And, uh, did just for a six, a six-pack for I think I did, I can't even remember, \$25, \$30, six-pack something, 20 something.

Anyway, um, but again, I did a pre-order 'cause my biggest fear is that someone will come... I live a little bit outside of town, not much. I have a lot of clients that live, you know, in the north of Topeka area, like I, where I'm at. Um, but some people will be like, "Oh my gosh, you live so far out north," 'cause they live on the other side of town, and it takes like 20 minutes to get to me, and add construction, that's like 30 minutes.

So my worst fear is that somebody's gonna drive 30 minutes to my house for cupcakes, and they're gonna be gone and sold out already. And so I do pre-orders so that way people know they're gonna have a pack waiting for them when they get there. Um, and s- but I know my limits. You know, I already had a full week of orders, and work was busy that week.

And so I think I did... You might even know more than I do. Um, I think I did maybe 100. I can't remember. Um, and again, they sold out like three minutes or something like that. So, but I made a lot of people happy that week versus the f- you know, 10 or 15 that I normally do. I got to reach, you know, 100 people that week.

So that was really fun, and I love to be able to do stuff like that. And looking forward again, I'm gonna kinda build in. And I did it for 2027 when I opened my calendar in April. I left a few weeks where I only had like three or four orders. I said, "You know what? I'm gonna go ahead and, and close off my calendar, say I'm booked, and then now when I get to those weeks, I'll be able to kind of do some pop-ups and fun things to kind of involve more people than like the current clients that I already have."

[00:59:34] **David Crabill:** Another fun thing that, you know, kind of side project I, I guess you'd call it, would be the, uh, the kids decorating contest.

[00:59:43] **Sara Warnow:** yes.

Love that. That's one of my favorite... Besides the cinnamon rolls, which are not my favorite to do, they are my favorite, um, project as far as giving back to the community. But I came up with my kids' de- cake decorating contest, and I've done it two years in a row now, and I will do it forever and ever as long as I possibly can because I love it so much.

So it was obviously born from me not ever having a birthday cake growing up. I actually did not have my first birthday cake till I was 32 years old, I think. One of my best friends, um, made me a cake, and I was shocked. I'm like, "Oh my gosh, a birthday cake for me?" Like, this has never happened in my life.

And it meant the world to me. And so for my birthday every year, which is February 24th, I, um, two years ago decided that I was going to give a cake away for my birthday. I also make myself a cake if I can. Um, but I, uh, wanted kids to get involved, and so I decided that I was going to just have a blank template and share it on my page and ask all of my followers to have their kids, any kids that they know, teachers have your kids in your classroom do it, whoever.

Decorate this blank canvas with if you could have any cake in the world, what would it look like? You know, go crazy. Have things flying off of it. You know, anything at all. I want to inspire that creativity that I've had my entire life in not really a direction of where that creativity was gonna lead me, but I know that it's so important for our kids to be creative.

So what's better than decorating your own cake and then entering a contest? And so I have them post pictures of those cakes on my page, and that's the, my favorite part is seeing all of the cakes. But not just seeing the cakes that these kids come up with, 'cause they're out of this world. Seeing the comments from my followers on those cakes.

They don't know, you know, most of them don't know these kids, and they'll be like, " Oh my gosh, this, this sea turtle cake is amazing." And my hope that the mom of that little girl that made that sea turtle cake reads those comments to her and says, "Oh, honey, look, you know, Susie from Australia just commented and said that she loves your cake."

Like, she may not win, you know. I can only do one. This year I am gonna do two. That's a little, um, secret I haven't let onto yet. Um But I can't make them all. But I can share them and let kids see that what they are doing is important, and it's, it's being seen. And it's important for them to know that that creativity is noticed, um, by people, and especially when it's a stranger, like that's even cooler.

so I take all of these submissions and all of these pictures that people, um, share, and I just ask, you know, your kid's first name and their age, and then I narrow it down to 20 because let's be honest, some of them... I mean, I'm, I'm pretty good, but I'm not... And some of them are so detailed that I'm like, "I don't know that I can even do that.

That kid is amazing." Um, so I narrow it down to 20 that I know with full confidence I can bring that cake to life, and I can do it exactly how that kid, um, decorated it and drew it and colored it and everything. And so then it turns into all these submissions, all these comments, and all these posts about all these cakes that kids have done, and then I bring my followers in and I say, "Okay, here's the 20 finalists," and they are from ages four to 4 to 18.

Um, and again, this year I'm gonna have a couple different age categories, but... And then I ask my followers to vote. Vote by loving, liking, commenting, reacting to which cake you think, A, not only the best, but also, B, one that you want to see me make. And then the winner, I give them a set amount of time, and I say, "Okay, voting ends, you know, Friday at 4:00," whatever.

And whoever has the most interactions, that's the cake that wins. And I get to make that cake then for my birthday and have the kid come over and pick up their cake and their creation that they dream, dream, dreamt up that I brought to life. And it's the just the best feeling in the world seeing their...

the kids, and granted, I've only done it twice now. Um, but seeing them see their drawing in real life is, is just one of my... Oh, I love it. It's amazing. Last year's winner actually, drew a cake with a teapot on the top, with a teacup on the bottom, with a stream of tea coming out. Now, obviously it's a picture, so it wasn't moving, but you know me, and I had to make it move.

So I made it come to life, and I actually figured out a way to put a pump in the back of the cake to actually pump colored water to where it recycled and the tea was actually being poured off of the cake, and that was freaking cool. I loved it

[01:04:32] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I, I was gonna ask you about that teapot cake because, you know, it kind of leads us into talking about the elaborate nature of some of your cakes. You know, we haven't really dug into that. Um, you, you don't- a lot of your cakes

are kind of more basic, more of your standard birthday cake, but then there are some times where you go all in.

Um, know you love to do realistic cakes. What have been some of your, like, most elaborate or complex cakes that you've done?

[01:05:01] **Sara Warnow:** I would

I would say definitely the realistic ones because you have to make them look spot on to what you're trying to, to replicate or else it's n- it's noticed if it's not. Um, so the kids decorating contest is one that I, I will go down to every single detail. Like, if they spelled, you know, there was a word that's like cockeyed and, you know, the writing's off center.

Like, I'll do it exactly how they did it because that's, that's what they drew, and that's what I wanna create. Um, I'd say probably my hardest, um, cakes have been, I've made a couple Jeep, um, replicas, and those are very difficult ' cause there is a lot of detail on those.

[01:05:40] **David Crabill:** With working

headlights,

[01:05:42] **Sara Warnow:** working headlights, yes, of course, 'cause, you know, you have to.

You have to be a little extra sometimes. Um, building replicas, while some may seem simple because it's a building, um, I did one for Kansas University this last year, and it was very difficult. Um, the textures, the colors, the, the different, um, fixtures and windows and doors and everything. So that one took a lot of time to do.

Um, shoe, I've done a, a Nike high-top shoe for actually, um, a groom's cake because he actually played professional basketball, and so it was his actual basketball shoe. So that one took quite a bit of detail too. Uh, one of my very first and most memorable, like, extra cakes, I would say, was I did my son's groom's cake, uh, when he got married.

I started my business in September of '21, and he got married in December of '21. So I did not do his wedding cake because it, that had been booked. Um, no hard feelings there. It was, it was fine . I'm like, "Let me just do a groom's cake at least," you know? And, uh, he likes his Maker's Mark, um, bourbon, and so I actually made a giant whiskey barrel, which again, not anything too crazy.

But I figured out a way to put a container inside the cake full of Maker's Mark with a spout that you could actually pour drinks from the cake. And I, I figured out, like, I had to

have a straw to get air in there for it to actually pour out, but then you could also refill it that way. Side note, that I...

It was a little bonus I didn't expect. Um, but it was so cool that one of his groomsmen came up to me at the wedding, and he was kinda like shaking his hand, and I said, "Oh, what's wrong?" And he's like, "The, the whiskey barrel must have been, had wet paint on it because I got, I got paint on my finger." And I said, "Oh, no, dude."

I said, "That's chocolate." And he's like, "What?" He didn't even know it was a cake. Like, he thought it was lit- literally a ba- a barrel that that's where he was pouring his drinks from all night. So that was really, really cool, um, and really kind of sparked my love of doing, like, extra kinda fun, fancy cakes that not everybody can do in town.

And again, kind of is what sets me apart from, from some others too

[01:07:55] **David Crabill:** Well, you know, I know probably a lot of the extra cakes you do are things that you're donating, and like with, especially with the kids, you know, you want to do as much as you can for them. But like, how do you find the balance, right? 'Cause when you're doing this as a business, especially if you're taking on 15 orders a week, right?

Like, I know you probably could do even more for all of the cakes that you put out. Like, when... Like, do you know, like, okay, this is good enough. Like, what have you learned about trying to find that balance and like, you know, make it sustainable as a business?

[01:08:30] **Sara Warnow:** Yeah, that, uh, that is a good, um balance that I have found because I do follow so many other cake bakers, um, on social medias and things. And some of my favorites are ones that do these giant, elaborate, like super detailed, very, very cool cakes that are like in a magazine. But they're doing like three, four a week, you know, and, and that's great.

Uh, I love their art and I know their clients do and... But not everybody, A, can afford that, um, and B, wants to dedicate that much time on one single cake. I have built my business more... I want to be-- And again, I can't be super available to everybody, I know, because I'm limited by time, um, and availability.

But I want to be able... A lot of people don't offer small cakes, like a four-inch smash cake, because you're not really making a lot of money on those because you still have to spend the time to decorate them versus a big cake. You know, it-it's not that much different. But a four-inch cake is much more affordable than an eight-inch or a two-tier or realistic cake.

So if I have people that if they're on a budget, but they've been on my calendar for a year and a half, or maybe they're having a hard time and they say, "You know, I really, really still wanna order, but I can only afford so much." "Okay. Tell me what you can afford. I will make you something that fits."

Whether it's a dozen just regular cupcakes that still taste amazing, or if it's a four-inch smash cake that only the birthday girl gets to enjoy by herself, but she feels special because she got her own individual cake that still looked really cool. Um, I don't wanna take that part away from my business.

I don't want to only do the biggest and the best and the most expensive cakes because then I'm not helping as many people, and that's not why I started this. Obviously, I wanna try to do as much as I can. So... And if people need to cancel because something did come up and they really can't afford anything, then by all means cancel.

Like, you know what? I'm not gonna fill your spot. I'm not gonna post on my page, "Guess what? I had a cancellation. I could take somebody or-order." You know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna sit down for like ten minutes on the couch and maybe watch a, you know, half a movie because that's about all I usually do.

Um, and I don't want people to feel guilty about that because, again, that's not what my business is built on. And so I don't do deposits. And this is a big, I'm sure, taboo, like, faux pas of home bakers. I do ask for a deposit on weddings only because, you know, you can only do so many weddings. I deliver all of those, and so my time is a little bit more, um, spread out for that.

I do not do deposits on my normal business or my normal cakes. I do not require prepayment. I would much rather have a spot for you, and if something comes up and you can't take that spot, then I either donate something to somebody or I just, again, I, I enjoy the free time with my family.

I

can do that because of the schedule I've kind of built myself, um, with this business.

And, and that's... It works for me. Also, girl math, if I get paid for a wedding six months before the wedding, I feel like I'm doing the wedding for free by the time I come to do it, 'cause not that I've spent the money, just that it's, it's been paid for. I'd rather get paid, like, the day of. Now, weddings, I do ask that I get paid, you know, a couple weeks before.

Again, that's separate. But all my other orders, like, no, pay me when you pick it up. Like, that's kind of a, "Hey, here's your, here's your reward for doing the work that you

just finished at midnight last night." I don't know. Again, you have to do what works for you, and that's what works for me. And I, I love it.

I love to be able to say, "Here's what I've created," surprise people with it, and then I want them to feel good about paying me for it and not, "Okay, well, here's my money. I hope I like the cake." You know? You know you like your cake because you're looking at it right there. So again, it's, it's a preference and, uh, I don't know, it works for me

[01:12:35] **David Crabill:** Of course, the concern here is that, you know, if you do post-payment, people might not pay or may have trouble getting them to pay.

Any issues with that?

[01:12:45] **Sara Warnow:** Never. I've never had an issue at all. And, and I'm not saying it won't ever happen. It might. But you pay when you pick it up. You know, you're not, I'm gonna come take the cake and... And I mean, I've had people... So we have a, we live in a barndominium, so it's all steel, um, roof and siding and everything.

And so our internet connection is not great inside the house, um, if you're not on our Wi-Fi. And so a lot of times people will come and their Wi-Fi signal's not great or their, their internet signal's not great, and so they can't get their Venmo to open or whatever. And so I'm like, "Just pay me when you get out into the driveway, or pay me when you get home.

I... It's fine. I'm not worried about it." 100% of the time people will pay me . I've never had somebody not pay. And so again, until that becomes an issue, and, and it might, but you know what? If, if somebody really, really can't pay, like I'm not gonna lose sleep over one order that, that somebody had a hard time with.

So I'm, I give a lot more grace than that, so

[01:13:40] **David Crabill:** Yeah. Well, and you know, clearly a big part of your success is just this connection, this community that you have. You know, I know you're c-collaborating with other bakers. You know, it's, you know, not just competition for you. And as a result of all of this, you know, you've built pent-up demand. You know, you, you could double your orders if you wanted to.

And as a result of this, you know, you don't really need to market yourself, right? You've got all this word-of-mouth marketing, and yet you still devote a ton of time to social media. I mean, I was looking, it looks like you post about 20 times per week onto Facebook. And it's like you, you often will record your decorating and everything, like, and post that.

That takes time, you know, editing time or whatever. You don't need to do any of that. So what, what pushes you to, like, do as much as you do on social media? 'Cause I'm sure that's, like, a whole side business

in and of itself.

[01:14:35] **Sara Warnow:** My, uh, my daughter actually is sh- and my son both, they're both in marketing, and I'm like, "Maybe I should just hire them 'cause they're really good at marketing." And they're like, "Mom, you don't need us. Like, you're great at marketing." I have no experience with marketing. I just have figured it out. Um, the reason that I do so much on social media is I, A, I, I'm proud of the work I do.

I, I want to share it. I want people to see, um, what my business is about, and I want to share those stories that where these cakes come from. I want people to know, like, you know, I just did one this last weekend. Um, this lady, her husband passed away recently, and she just got moved into memory care 'cause she's got dementia.

And, you know, uh, her family doesn't know if this might be her last birthday she remembers, and so they wanted a special cake. And so I got to share that with people, and again, with their permission. I never overshare if people don't want me to. Um, but because I have so many followers, of all of those people that follow my page, again, the percentage of those people that will ever order from me is so small that I want to stay relevant on their news feeds.

I want them to see that you may not order from me, but I'm working my butt off behind the scenes and still doing all of these cool things that I wanna share with you. And honestly, like, social media is hard. It's, it's... There's a lot of bad news out there. There's a lot of negativity. There's politics and these, you know, horrible natural disasters and all of these things that are going on that when you're scrolling through your Facebook and you see my name pop up, I want you to know that...

Sorry, I'm gonna get emotional. I've done really good. I haven't till now, and I'm a very emotional person. Um, I want you to know that that post that you're about to read is gonna make you feel good,, you know, hands down. I mean, it may make you cry. Uh, some of my posts definitely make people cry. They make me cry when I'm writing them.

Um, but you're gonna, you're gonna read it, and you're gonna know, like, this is a good, positive story. This is, you know, oh, hey, this is a cool cake, or, you know, oh, I've never even heard of this organization that Sara just did desserts for. Like, now I wanna go research it, and maybe I can donate my time for the, you know, to them, or maybe I can...

What's the Ronald McDonald House need? Maybe I can donate some, you know, dinner one night or whatever, so if I just did everything I did in silence and didn't share it, think of all those stories that wouldn't be told, you know? Or all of these, um, organizations and things that people, they would have never heard of, but they heard about them because I shared them.

So I, when I started the business and it kind of started growing, and I saw that I could have an impact, I, I knew that I wanted to do something good. I wanted to have a voice, and I wanted to make people feel good because I was tired of seeing all the negativity. So, uh, yeah, so I just spend a lot of time trying to relay that as much as I can.

If I can be that one page that you follow that you're always looking forward to seeing what I'm up to and what kind of craziness and what kind of cakes I've come up with, then, you know, I, I wanna be able to do that for people, even if you aren't one of my clients or you don't even live in the United States

[01:18:03] **David Crabill:** Well, let's talk about the future. I mean, I'm looking back and I see, you know, you fully booked out 2025 by March of 2025. You fully booked out this year, 2026, by January of this year, and then you fully booked out 2027 by, I think, May or June of this year. I don't know how much of 2028 you already have booked out, but, you

[01:18:27] **Sara Warnow:** I've, I, I'm waiting. I, I have a few brides that have 2028 dates, um, but I try to wait just 'cause I, I travel for my day job quite a bit too, and so I need to know those dates and vacations and stuff. So 2028 is still wide open, but don't message me about it yet.

[01:18:46] **David Crabill:** Right. Right. Yes, I know,

like next spring you'll open it up, and I'm sure, I'm sure it'll get booked out in two days. But, uh, you know, what, what do you see yourself, you know, doing in the future? Like, where do you see this business going, or where would you like it to go?

[01:19:01] **Sara Warnow:** You know, honestly, I really like the way it's going right now. I, I don't wanna, I don't wanna make any big changes because I am really happy with, with what I've built so far. Um, I, again, I would like to have the offerings where I can have the smaller orders available for people that can't, again, get on my calendar.

Um, so that's one thing. And I, I really do enjoy, like, the video, um... And I hear it a lot from my followers. Like, "Hey, do more videos of you just decorating a cake or the process or even just, you know, crumb coating a cake." Like, um, but as you know, that content takes a lot of time to edit and to put together and, and I'm not great at that.

I think I could be if I had the time to dedicate to it, and I don't. Um, but I would like to be able to do a little bit more of that, um, because I am a content creator on Facebook, so I do receive, like, a small income for the content I post. So there is a little bit of kickback there for the more views you get and the more reach you have and things.

Um, I never focus on that. I don't even really look at, like, when Facebook tells you, "Oh, this post is..." You know, I don't, I don't pay attention to that necessarily, but I do know that people enjoy that, and that's something that, um, I could have m- a lot of success with if I devoted that time to it. But I'm not willing to really give up the actual work to do that.

Like, I don't wanna make less cakes so I can post more c- more content, you know? So I have kind of thought about, I have like a three or four-year plan where when I am ready to retire, um, from my full-time job, we'll see. Um, I love, love, love my coworkers so much that when they all retire, then, then maybe I'll be like, "Okay, well, then I'll, I'll leave now too, 'cause you're all leaving."

Um, and at that point, I could see myself maybe having like somewhat of a shop. I don't want a full-time bakery where I'm open Monday through Saturday, 8:00 to 5:00. That's not me. I don't wanna be stuck in a building, you know? But if I have an area where I can say, "Okay, every Saturday morning at 8:00 AM, we're gonna open up.

We're gonna do six cool flavors." And I love themes. I love... You know, obviously you have all the holidays, but how fun would it be to, um, be like, "Okay, it's my birthday week. Here's my six favorite flavors of cupcakes," you know? Or, "Let's do Little Debbie Snack Cake cupcakes this week, and here's six different..."

You know, and just kinda come up with different themes, and do a drop and, and first come, first served. Then I don't have to worry about taking pre-orders. I don't have to worry about, um, scheduling people for pickup. I just, I open up, and that's when you come in. So that's kind of, I think, a, a fun goal that I would have in a few years when I have the time.

And also, uh, decorating classes. I did one. I donated it to my local, um, elementary school for a silent auction. They were asking for experiences and I thought, "Oh, I know. I, I, you know, I make cakes." And then I thought, "Oh, wait, that is an experience. I can have people come over." So I had six ladies come over to my house, and I had stations for everybody.

And I had the margarita machine going. I had snacks. And I was like, "We're gonna have a good time." Let me tell you, those ladies came over to learn. They wanted to

know how to decorate a cake. And so what I thought we were gonna be like having fun girls night out turned into an actual legit cake decorating class, and it was so much fun.

It... We really, really had a good time, and they blew me out of the water. They did a great job with their decorating. And so That was a really fun thing that I wasn't sure how I would enjoy. Now, I've gone to, I've gone to lots of elementary schools, and I've decorated cupcakes and, and stuff with kids. Um, but having like actual adults and being able to actually teach them like these real skills, it was really fun.

And so I think it would be neat if I had a space to do like these pop-up cupcake, you know, kind of... And my, my, I've envisioned the whole back wall of glass front refrigerators where I put my custom orders, so when people come to pick up their cakes or their cupcakes, they get to see all the custom cakes I've made.

Because let me tell you, my cakes are cool on, in pictures, but they're way better in person. So then it'd be fun to them to get to see that. But then to also have an area for classes, um, where I could do cake decorating classes, and I could do it for kids, and I could do it for girls' nights out, girls' night out, uh, with margaritas, or I could do like a real, like, we're here to learn, so we'll, we'll have, you know, soda and coffee and water, so.

[01:23:39] **David Crabill:** I'm just thinking about this whole journey of yours. I mean, you've come so far, and yet it could have all, like, never happened. You know? You, you never were, like, a super passionate cake decorator. You, I don't, didn't sound like you were, like, super into entrepreneurship or anything like that. And, um, you know, like, it, it, I know it came out of your spare time, but you could have easily, like, done something else with your spare time and never could have had this business in the first place.

So as you look back on the last five years, what has this business meant to you?

[01:24:13] **Sara Warnow:** Gosh, uh, I say this a lot, um, and I really, really mean it. It is about so much more than cake. Like yeah, I make cakes, like that's what this business was built on. But it really came out of my desire to, to make a change, like just to do something for others, and I didn't know what that even really looked like.

Um, and I didn't really expect it to have taken on... I, I didn't expect that to become like my persona. Like that's what this business is. Yes, I make cool cakes, but I've been able to use those cakes to really reach out to the community, reach out and bring... shed, shed some light on, you know, all these other really, really big important things that are going on in our, in our lives that maybe we don't know about.

But I have a voice now, and I didn't expect to have a voice. And so now that I have it, I just... my mind is always going like, "Well, what can I... How can I use it for good?" You know? Again, yes, I can make cakes, and I can donate cakes, and I can do cinnamon rolls, and this and that. One of my favorite things I did is, um, I, I lost a friend of mine to cancer, and she was a teacher.

And so in her, her honor, I asked people to nominate a teacher who deserves a free cake. And, but not just nominate them, tell me why. Why did they deserve to win? And oh my gosh, the comments and the kind words and like, the... And I asked them to tag their teachers, you know, that they were nominating. And so, 'cause I wanted them to see it.

And they got to read all of these nice, nice comments. You know, some people would... some woman would say, you know, "My, my daughter's third grade teacher, Mrs. Calhoun, was amazing, and she did this, and this, and this." And then people would comment under, "Oh my gosh, my daughter had her in third grade 10 years ago, and she..."

You know? It, I mean, one person won, but oh my gosh, all those teachers, they were all winners 'cause... But again, it wasn't about the cake. It wasn't all about the cake at the end. It was about giving people a platform to say something nice about somebody that made an impact in their life, and know that it was being heard and seen and read and yeah, I get to do that. It's pretty cool.

[01:26:46] **David Crabill:** Well, it is amazing what you have built and are building, and I think it's pretty easy to see why you've been as successful as you have been. Now, if someone would like to learn more about you, where can they find you or how can they reach out?

[01:27:01] **Sara Warnow:** Ah. So Facebook's probably the best. I, um... That's where I'm the most active. That's where I have, um, received most of my messages, uh, through Facebook messaging. Although it's kind of strange with Facebook, if you're a business and you try to message a business, you don't necessarily, um, have that option. So on my Facebook page, I have my email, I have my cell phone number, I, I have my website.

Any of those, um, avenues are great to reach out to me, and I am more than happy to help anybody in any way, shape, or form I can. Um, if they have a question about the kids decorating contest, I've had people who have asked me, "Hey, you know, can I steal your idea?" And I'm like, "It's not stealing." I mean, I don't, I don't copyright it or anything.

Like, please do. Like, the more people that are doing some of the things I'm doing, like just think of the reach that we have and how many more people can be touched by, you know, just these little things that you're able to do. You know, somebody stealing my ideas, which again is not stealing, it's not gonna affect my business. If anything, it makes me feel good that you are seeing something I'm doing and wanna, you know, use that in your own community.

So I am all about helping other people grow and, and share as much as they can.

[01:28:17] **David Crabill:** Awesome. Well, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today

[01:28:22] **Sara Warnow:** You are welcome. Thank you so much for having me.

[01:28:27] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager Podcast. For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/177. And if you enjoyed this episode, I have a favor to ask you. If you are watching this on YouTube, could you subscribe to my channel and like this video? And if you're listening to this on a podcast player, if you could leave me a review on Apple Podcasts or a rating on Spotify, anything that you can do to help engage with the show will help others like you find it as well.

And finally, if you're thinking about selling your own homemade food, check out my mini course where I walk you through the steps you need to take to get a cottage food business off the ground. To get the course, go to cottagefoodcourse.com. Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.